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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO  
E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. Syrian-Lebanese Track

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Key stories in the media:  
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Yediot quoted President Bush as saying Monday, at a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II, that "the United States and my government will be involved with Middle Eastern peace, and that I believe that two states living side-by-side in peace -- a Palestinian state and an Israeli state -- is necessary for there to be peace, and that we have a moment, a window of opportunity." Jerusalem Post briefly cited the President's remarks. Yediot also quoted senior U.S. Administration officials as saying in recent days that Israel must strengthen Abbas's status and position among Palestinians through a prisoner release and other steps such as the removal of roadblocks, and granting freedom of travel and work permits to the Palestinians.

Ha'aretz (Aluf Benn) reported that there is a brewing dispute in Israel over British PM Tony Blair's proposal for an international conference on the Middle East in January or February after the Palestinian elections to grant the new PA leadership international legitimacy. The newspaper says that Sharon is opposed to the renewal of the diplomatic process until the Palestinians take action to fulfill the first stage of the road map, meaning putting an end to terrorism and implementing security reforms. According to Ha'aretz, Sharon is prepared for the conference to take part without Israeli participation, and for it to be a one-day event for professionals that would deal with reforms in the PA. The daily says that FM Silvan Shalom does not reject the idea of the conference and that he is ready to consider Israeli participation at the FM's level, but that he made clear to European counterparts that he is opposed to "skipping" directly to negotiations over the final-status agreement. Jerusalem Post reported that an unnamed "senior Israel official" made similar remarks. Jerusalem Post cited London's Daily Telegraph as saying that President Bush is opposed to a conference like the one that followed the 1991 Gulf War.

Israel Radio reported that this morning an IDF soldier was killed and four others were wounded at the Karni Crossing into the northern Gaza Strip. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack. The radio and Ha'aretz web site reported that hours later (according to Ha'aretz web site) in the same area an IAF missile killed an Islamic Jihad activist. Ha'aretz reported that a Palestinian working in Neve Dekalim, one of the Gush Katif (Gaza Strip) settlers, was lightly wounded Monday by a mortar shell launched from Khan Yunis. The newspaper also reported that a psychologist specializing in the trauma faced by Gush Katif (Gaza Strip) settlements who face both evacuation and almost daily mortar attacks has launched a Web site to provide area residents with information about dealing with pressure and crises.

All media reported that the army is investigating the conditions surrounding an incident last Friday in which members of a unit of the prestigious Shayetet (naval commando) killed Mahmoud Kmel, a senior Islamic Jihad activist, who was apparently unarmed and did not represent a risk. The Shayetet has been put on hold as far as operations in the West Bank are concerned. The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem had requested the

probe. Leading media quoted the head of the IDF personnel branch, Maj. Gen. Elazar Stern as saying Monday that 20 percent of IDF soldiers come from a culture that does not view Arab lives as equal to those of Jews. Stern said, "Every generation needs to see itself as if it had come out of Auschwitz" (a reference to the Passover Seder's commandment: "In every generation you must see yourself as being in Egypt"). Stern was speaking before the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, which convened to discuss the just use of force in the war on terror.

Israel Radio reported that security forces have arrested a resident of Baqa el-Gharbiyeh, an Israeli-Arab town adjacent to the Green Line, whom Iran had allegedly recruited as a spy.

Leading media reported that Monday in Damascus PLO Secretary-General Mahmoud Abbas and Syrian President

#### SIPDIS

Bashar Assad agreed on coordinating positions ahead of possible negotiations with Israel, and that the senior Palestinians who visited Syria (Abbas, Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala), and Acting PA Chairman Rawhi Fattouh) asked Assad to press Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders in Damascus to cooperate with them. The media reported that the Palestinian delegation met with local leaders of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Ahmed Jibril's PFLP-GC.

Jerusalem Post quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying Monday before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, that the boosting of ties between Israel and Egypt is a "strategic significant process" that is to include cooperation in fighting regional and global terror. The media continued to report on the conditions of the imprisonment of Azzam Azzam, who was released from an Egyptian jail during the weekend. PM Sharon visited Maghar, Azzam's village, on Monday. The media argued over the fact that Channel 10-TV is paying Azzam some USD 40,000 for the exclusive rights of an interview with him.

Ha'aretz quoted Sharon associates as saying Monday that Sharon will settle accounts with any minister or Knesset member who fails to help persuade the Likud Central Committee to approve the Labor Party's entry into the government, while those who do help him will be rewarded. Maariv reported that the Likud "rebels" are considering voting in the Knesset against Labor's entry into the government, if the Likud Central Committee approves the move. Yediot reported that members of the Labor Party increasingly oppose Shimon Peres's desire to see Labor enter the government immediately. Yediot quoted Peres as saying that primaries in the party would thwart the planned disengagement.

Jerusalem Post reported that Israel, which has consistently tried to keep the EU out of the diplomatic process, is now pressing it to use its clout to get Arab countries to develop with Israel. Israel Radio reported that Israel-EU talks on the "European Neighborhood policy" have hit a snag regarding the EU's condition that countries participating in the program sign a WMD clause. The agreement must be finalized by Thursday.

Jerusalem Post quoted President Moshe Katsav as saying Monday that if Assad is sincere about resuming peace negotiations, he should at least make some kind of goodwill gesture, such as returning the remains of Eli Cohen to Israel. Cohen was convinced of spying and hanged in Damascus in 1965.

All media reported that on Monday a Jerusalem Magistrate's Court sentenced Shahar Dvir-Zeliger, a member of the "new Jewish underground," to eight years in jail for membership in a terrorist organization aimed at carrying out terror attacks against Arab civilians, and for unlawful possession of weapons stolen from the IDF.

Citing Reuters, Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian officials as saying in Ramallah Monday that the PA will ask donor countries at a meeting in Oslo for about USD 4 million to stave off an economic crisis.

The media cited two Palestinian public opinion polls, which predict a close contest between Abbas and Marwan Barghouti in the PA elections.

Israel Radio reported that Al Qaida has claimed responsibility for Monday's attack on the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah.

Ha'aretz reported that Atty. Fred Fielding, a "highly respected Washington insider," will mediate between the U.S. Justice Department and lawyers who filed class action lawsuits on the issue of the "gold train," the trainload of looted gold and art stolen from Jews by the Nazis that was subsequently confiscated by U.S. troops, but that was never returned to the property's lawful owners.

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I. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The window of opportunity for achieving a cease-fire with the Palestinians is wider than ever. Israel's government must not miss this chance for a cease-fire and a renewal of the peace process."

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "[The Labor Party's entry into the government] constitutes real progress, which could suddenly be dampened in a cynical maneuver to move up the Knesset elections before [the] Gush Katif [settlement bloc] is evacuated."

Oslo Agreement skeptic and Hebrew University Professor Yehoshua Porat wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Why is Egypt investing a fortune in the purchase of sophisticated weapons which are patently intended for a rapid crossing of the Sinai peninsula, in order to attack its northeastern neighbor?"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If the UN wants to convincingly demonstrate a genuinely new beginning, the GA should elect Israel to a two-year Security Council seat."

Block Quotes:  
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I. "Supportive Steps Needed"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (December 7): "The weakness of Hamas's leadership in the territories has increased the importance of the Palestinian opposition's 'external leadership,' most of which lives in Damascus. It is these men with whom Abu Mazen is trying to reach an understanding on the conditions for a cease-fire. Abu Mazen is also taking advantage of the upcoming elections for the PA chairmanship to convince Hamas to stop the attacks, if only for a limited period, not only inside Israel, but also in the West Bank and Gaza. Such an understanding is possible in part because of the heavy pressure that the Syrian regime is exerting on the Palestinian opposition leaders in Damascus. These leaders understand quite well that at a time when President Assad is calling for a renewal of peace talks with Israel, he is not going to allow the Palestinian organizations under his aegis to launch terror attacks against Israel. The window of opportunity for achieving a cease-fire with the Palestinians is wider than ever. Israel's government must not miss this chance for a cease-fire and a renewal of the peace process."

II. "In the Right Direction"

Veteran print and TV journalist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 7): "It is wrong [for the Labor Party] to condition its entry into the government upon a commitment to moving up the Knesset elections -- especially as [former prime minister Ehud] Barak supports the dismantling of [the] Gush Katif settlement bloc.... The right formula for Labor's joining the government is the following one: the necessary condition is the continuation of the implementation of the disengagement plan, to which Sharon claims to be wholly committed -- in defiance of the Likud refuseniks. This constitutes real progress, which could suddenly be dampened in a cynical maneuver to move up the Knesset elections before Gush Katif is evacuated.... Since the process of joining the government is not an ephemeral move, Labor must bring its best representatives into the government -- all the more so when this government will be marked by many upheavals, landmines, and political ambushes. Barak is one of those people."

### III. "Illusions in a New Edition"

Oslo Agreement skeptic and Hebrew University Professor Yehoshua Porat wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 7): "On Sunday, the [Israeli] media kept filing happy reports from Egypt.... What was less manifest was the fact that Azzam Azzam spent eight years in an Egyptian jail for trying to do business in Egypt, according to what the peace treaty allowed and established.... According to the peace treaty, an Egyptian ambassador should be present in Israel. For years, Israel held back regarding this flagrant violation of the treaty. Israel taught the entire Arab world that it was possible to turn a blind eye to contractual commitments to Israel.... Talking about peace, does any of Israel decision-makers understand why Egypt needs armored forces to prevent arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip?.... More importantly: why is Egypt investing a fortune in the purchase of sophisticated weapons which are patently intended for a rapid crossing of the Sinai peninsula, in order to attack its northeastern neighbor?.... This is without mentioning the anti-Israel, anti-Semitic, almost Nazi incitement in Egypt's official media."

### IV. "UN Self-Interest"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 7): "The UN, on the brink of irrelevancy, is struggling to save itself. Given its antipathy toward the Zionist enterprise, should we help it succeed or hope that it heads over the edge? The answer should depend on whether plans announced Thursday at UN headquarters to radically transform the world body have the potential of offering Israel a 'new deal'.... If the UN wants to convincingly demonstrate a genuinely new beginning, the GA should elect Israel to a two-year Security Council seat. No nation has been so mean-spiritedly singled out, so consistently and for so long, as Israel. No nation has suffered more from the tyranny of the UN majority, targeted through countless denunciatory, one-sided resolutions. Entire UN-related international bodies have been permanently hijacked for Israel-bashing. Electing Israel to the Security Council would signal that the community of nations rejects, de jure and forever, threats to wipe Israel off the map. At the same time, such a declarative vote would reassure Israel that its painful concessions (in Gaza, for instance) are valued by the world community. If Palestine is to be the 22nd Arab member in a UN where 58 countries are already aligned with the Islamic bloc, Israel deserves preference on the rotation of countries that hold temporary Security Council seats.... Reforming the UN will be no easy task; we will know it is on the right track when it begins to apply the charter's universal values to Israel."

### 12. Syrian-Lebanese Track:

#### Summary:

Contributor Ran Baratz wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The bad thing [about reaching an agreement with Syria] would be that Syrian-UN-European cooperation against the U.S. would harm Israel."

#### Block Quotes:

##### "Assad's Trap"

Contributor Ran Baratz wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 7): "A seasonal excitement, due to Assad Jr.'s peace calls 'without preconditions', has recently seized some [Israeli] commentators... An important development, which occurred a little over one year ago, was the U.S. decision to isolate Syria and to weaken it significantly. That decision, which was backed by the U.S. Congress, is starting to bear fruit -- as evidenced by the weakness of Assad, whom nobody views as an angel.... The bad thing [about reaching an agreement with Syria] would be that Syrian-UN-European cooperation against the U.S. would harm Israel. Warm relations with the U.S. are preferable to peace with Syria, whose chances of coming about are small at best. The Americans' interest in pressuring Syria is big. Firstly, they want to hinder the possibility that Iran, Syria's close friend, create ... additional fronts in the region.... Secondly, they remember Assad's help to Saddam and the Iraqi opposition forces.... Thirdly, Syria ... has become a highly significant factor in Palestinian terrorism, creating an extra obstacle to

American policy."

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